

Should ESL Teachers Transform Their Classrooms into 'Sites of Struggle' for Radical Egalitarianism?

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Caesar: "Pardon him Theodotus: he is a barbarian, and thinks that the customs of his tribe and island are the laws of nature." -- *Caesar and Cleopatra*, Act II, by George Bernard Shaw

1. Introduction

In a widely-read article that appeared several years ago in *TESOL Quarterly*, Dwight Atkinson wrote that "[e]xcept for *language, learning*, and

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teaching, there is perhaps no more important concept in the field of TESOL than *culture* Yet there has been remarkably little direct attention given to the notion of culture in TESOL over the past 15 years” (1999:625). Such benign neglect notwithstanding, three recent articles in particular, by Zamel (1997), Spack (1997), and Kubota (1999), have provoked considerable discussion among applied linguists regarding the practice of *Orientalizing*¹⁾, Othering, stereotyping, generalizing, (mis)representing, and essentializing²⁾ students from non-Western cultural backgrounds. In the following paper I will summarize, discuss, and critique in detail the third article, Ryuko Kubota’s “Japanese Culture Constructed by Discourses: Implications for Applied Linguistics Research and ELT,” for two reasons: first, because it was written by the only non-Westerner among the three scholars³⁾, and second, because it raises particularly provocative questions about the feasibility and desirability of introducing Critical Pedagogy (CP) into ESL classrooms.

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- 1) This neologism was coined by Edward Said, whose magnum opus *Orientalism* (1978) has had an enormous impact on Western academia from the Vietnam War era to the present. “Orientalism is a style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction made between ‘the Orient’ and (most of the time) ‘the Occident’” (p. 2). “Orientalism can be discussed and analyzed as the corporate institution for dealing with the Orient – dealing with it by making statements about it, authorizing views of it, describing, by teaching it, settling it, ruling over it. In short, Orientalism is a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient” (p. 3). Orientalism is an “imperialist tradition” (p. 15), “a kind of intellectual authority over the Orient within Western culture”(p. 19), “a political vision of reality whose structure promoted the difference between the familiar (Europe, the West, ‘us’) and the strange (the Orient, the East, ‘them’)” (p. 43), and “a set of constraints upon and limitations of thought” (p. 42) See B. Susser (1998:1-5).
 - 2) Anti-essentialism is a key concept among postmodernists, who contend that there is nothing essential about human beings. To think otherwise only diminishes the uniqueness, the otherness, of individual human beings.
 - 3) Ryuko Kubota is a Japanese associate professor in the School of Education and the Curriculum in Asian Studies at the University of North Carolina (Chapel Hill), where she teaches Japanese language and culture, among other subjects. Interestingly, all three of the above-mentioned applied linguists acknowledged receiving help from each other in writing their TESOL Quarterly articles: Vivian Zamel (1997) received help from Spack ; Ruth Spack (1997) received help from Zamel, and Ryuko Kubota (1999) in turn received help from Spack.

In her *TESOL Quarterly* article, Kubota complains that recently some applied linguists, especially contrastive rhetoric researchers involved in devising pedagogies to teach writing and critical thinking to ESL students, have tended to create a “cultural dichotomy” between the East and the West, particularly between Japan and the U.S. Whereas Japanese culture has been essentialized by some applied linguists as collectivistic, “groupistic,” harmonious, indirect, and devoid or lacking of critical thinking and self-expression, U.S. culture displays the opposite – and frankly positive – characteristics: individualism, directness, precision, creativity, originality, and analytical thinking, to name just a few. It is not hard to imagine the intense embarrassment and bitter resentment experienced by Japanese applied linguists whenever they hear such negative stereotypes about their culture bandied about by Western applied linguists at international conferences or in reputable journals. 4)

Kubota argues that these “taken-for-granted” cultural differences must be re-evaluated by applied linguists from poststructuralist and postcolonial perspectives. Cultures, according to these perspectives, are not monolithic, fixed, neutral, or objective, but are instead dynamic organisms that exist in discursive fields where power is exercised. Thus, these distinctive cross-cultural labels, these oversimplified generalizations of language and culture that appear regularly in applied linguistics literature, manifest power struggles within the culture and between cultures, whereby the dominant groups

4) Such cultural generalizations about Japanese and Asians in general are obviously deeply offensive to most Asians. Tan (1992:61-62), responding to a *New York Times Magazine* article that characterizes the Chinese people as being “discrete and modest” and that the Chinese language as having an “inherent ambivalence,” having no words for “yes” and “no,” writes that whenever she hears these generalizations, her “throat seize[s]. Why do people keep saying these things? As if we truly were those little dolls sold in Chinatown tourist shops, heads bobbing up and down in complacent agreement to anything said!” After having lived in the “Orient” for thirty years, I can say with reasonable certainty, however, that “hairy, smelly, beetle-browed, blue-eyed Western barbarians” are not the only ones who have managed to corner the market on racism, ethnocentrism, cultural stereotyping, and the like.

defines the subordinate group as the exotic *Other*.⁵⁾ The bulk of Kubota's article is then devoted to demonstrating that because Japanese culture has been unfairly misrepresented particularly by Western applied linguists, this and similar injustices can only be rectified through the implementation of various radical pedagogical reforms such as critical multiculturalism.

Kubota's article has five main sections: 1) Japanese culture in the applied linguistics literature; 2) the cultural representation of the Other as constructed by discourse; 3) the discourse appropriated by the Other: the uniqueness of Japanese culture; 4) counter-knowledge from recent research on Japanese education; and 5) pedagogical issues: critical approaches to culture and language. After summarizing all five sections⁶⁾ I will present brief comments on certain aspects of Kubota's article in *TESOL Quarterly*, occasionally borrowing from Craig Sower (1999) and Dwight Atkinson (1999), two applied linguists who currently live and teach in Japanese colleges, and from Kubota's responses (1999) to their comments on her article.

2. Japanese Culture in the Applied Linguistics Literature

As mentioned above, Western applied linguists⁷⁾ tend to draw a "rigid

5) For Edward Said, the Orient is one of the West's "deepest and most recurring images of the *Other*" (1978:1). Although Said's book concentrates on the Middle East, other scholars have described China and Japan as the West's "Other." Geertz (1988:116), commenting on Ruth Benedict's *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword*, says, "Japan ... has been for us more absolutely otherwise. It has been the Impossible Object." Othering is not evil, per se: to know myself, I must differentiate myself from others. Dangers arise when "the nature of this 'Other,' in reality, has less to do with who the 'Other' is than with the identity of the subject who is gazing at the 'Other'" (Befu 1992:17). As a result, one ends up interpreting the Other in the light of one's own self-perceptions. See Susser (1998).

6) I will endeavor to use sparingly the phrases "Kubota notes," "Kubota argues," or "Kubota claims," and simply summarize her arguments as they are presented, albeit in a condensed form.

7) And perhaps Eastern applied linguists who have "blindly or subconsciously" internalized

boundary” and create a fixed dichotomy between Western culture, particularly the U.S.’s, and Eastern culture, particularly Japan’s. Japanese culture is frequently portrayed in applied linguistics literature as traditional, homogeneous, and group-oriented, with a strong emphasis on harmony and togetherness. Because the allegedly ingrained collectivism of Japanese culture overrides individual interests, self-expression, creativity, and originality are discouraged or neglected. Because the characteristic individualism of U.S. culture takes preference over group interests, self-expression, creativity, and originality are encouraged. This rigid cultural dichotomization is especially noticeable in research areas such as contrastive rhetoric, “in which Japanese written discourse is characterized as indirect, implicit, and inductive as opposed to English discourse, which is described as direct and deductive” (p. 12). The assumption behind this dichotomization is that both Japanese and U.S. writing discourse are culturally determined.

Researchers such as Carson (1992), citing Duke (1986), and Tobin, Wu, and Davidson (1989), claim that the educational system in Japan trains students to value group goals over individual interests. Carson notes that in Japanese classrooms traditional techniques such as memorization, repetition, and drilling are practiced, rather than techniques that promote creativity and innovation. Carson and Nelson (1994) and McKay (1993) note that teachers must be aware of cultural differences among their students and “expose, accommodate, or exploit” these differences in order to help their students. Certain writing techniques may be pedagogically inappropriate or inefficacious in some cultures. For example, the alleged impersonal attitude of Asian students toward out-group vis-à-vis in-group members may foster hostility and competitiveness *within* writing groups.

McKay cites Ballard and Clanchy (1991) who argue that all cultures are arrayed on a continuum from placing value on conserving knowledge to

the *Orientalizing* discourse of their “Western oppressors.”

placing value on extending knowledge. Asian cultures value the former, the conservation of knowledge, hence the emphasis on rote memorization and blind imitation. Conversely, Western cultures fall somewhere in the middle or the opposite end of the continuum, the extension of knowledge, hence the emphasis on analytical or critical thinking. Atkinson (1997) concludes that the “culturally specific values” underlying the notion of critical thinking are incompatible with Asian cultural values. The concept of critical thinking presupposes the critical thinker is imbued with individualistic cultural values. Therefore, ESL professionals must exercise restraint in order to not marginalize minority students by adopting methods and techniques that are culturally-biased. Atkinson suggests ESL teachers adopt instead a *cognitive apprenticeship approach* to teach critical thinking skills to ESL students through modeling and coaching.

Fox (1994) describes the Japanese written communication style as indirect, vague, polite, and devoid of critical thinking. The cultural differences in East-West communication styles create pedagogical conflicts when Asian students attend U.S., Canadian, U.K., or Australian educational institutions, which promote a different discourse convention. Should U.S. universities, for example, tolerate diverse communication styles, in an effort to promote cultural pluralism and cross-cultural understanding? Or should ESL students be compelled to assimilate Western communication styles, which are allegedly characterized by directness, precision, analysis, critical thinking, and originality?

All of the above-mentioned studies tend to dichotomize Western and Eastern cultures and set rigid cultural boundaries between the two, the assumption being that human behavior is culturally determined. However, other researches, in particular Spack (1997), Zamel (1997), and Susser (1998) argue that such East-West cultural distinctions are classic examples of *Orientalizing*, *Othring*, stereotyping, (mis)representing, generalizing, and

essentializing Japanese culture and Japanese students. However, criticisms of the essentialization and exoticization of cultures, of cultural determinism, tend to emphasize similarities between cultures and diversity *within* a culture. This is problematic because such an argument perpetuates binary logic⁸⁾ (same versus different, diverse versus homogeneous, unsystematic versus systematic) which underlies the cultural dichotomization of East versus West.

In classic postmodernist fashion, Kubota argues that no truth(s) about culture can be discovered "in a positivist sense"(p. 15).⁹⁾ Cultures are particular knowledges constructed by discourse. She does not deny that cultural differences exist, though the impression one gets from her article is that these differences are of little more import than differences in the size and shape of neckties. She claims her primary concern in her article is to criticize cultural dichotomizations from the concepts of discourse and power/knowledge.

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- 8) Binary logic (or binary opposites) is a key concept in postmodernism, and one for which Derrida is best known. People think in terms of opposites, and things are identified by what they are not, an idea that has its roots in Saussureian linguistics. There are countless dichotomies in the world: mind-body, male-female, up-down, internal-external, beginning-end, speech-writing, West-East, and so on, ad infinitum. These are not only dichotomies; they are hierarchies. For example, most people regard the beginning as more important, "more privileged" than the end. Space limitations prevent any discussion of Derridian deconstruction, other than to record the practitioner's pessimism resulting from the impossibility of a genuinely rigorous deconstruction: "I would say that deconstruction loses nothing from admitting that it is impossible; also that those who would rush to delight in that admission lose nothing from having to wait. For a deconstructive operation possibility would rather be a danger, the danger of becoming an available set of rule-governed procedures, methods, accessible practices. The interest of deconstruction, of such force and desire as it may have, is a certain experience of the impossible..." (*Psyche: Invention of the Other*, 1984).
- 9) "Positivism ... is a philosophical doctrine that denies any validity to speculation or metaphysics. Sometimes associated with empiricism, positivism maintains that metaphysical questions are unanswerable and that the only knowledge is scientific knowledge. The basic tenets of positivism are contained in an implicit form in the works of Francis Bacon, George Berkeley, and David Hume, but the term is specifically applied to the system of Auguste Comte, who developed the coherent doctrine." From <http://www.encyclopedia.com/articles/10433.html>.

3. The Cultural Representation of the Other as Constructed by Discourse

The East-West cultural distinctions that appear regularly in recent applied linguistics literature are based on the mistaken notion that such labels represent objective, scientific truth. However, “this knowledge can be viewed as neither true, nor scientific, nor neutral but rather as existing discursive relations in which power is circulated, exercised, and attached to a particular form of knowledge” (p. 16). Borrowing heavily on Foucauldian concepts (1980), Kubota argues that “power is transmitted, produced, and reinforced as well as diminished and thwarted by discourse” (p. 16), and indeed “it is in discourse that power and knowledge are joined together” (Foucault 1978:100). As a knowledge, the cultural representations of the exotic Other are constructed through discourses that define the Other. Thus, labels that symbolize cultural dichotomies – e.g., collectivism versus individualism, preserving knowledge versus extending knowledge – do not reflect cultural differences, they create and perpetuate them. Borrowing heavily also on Memmian (1967) and Saidian concepts (1978), Kubota argues that this “construction of Otherness is part of the colonial discourse” perpetrated by the “white male ruling class in Enlightenment paradigms” (p. 16). The colonizing “us” always depersonalizes and victimizes the colonized “them,” with negative qualities such as backwardness, opacity, and illogicality in order to create “Western authority over the Orient” (p. 17), in order to maintain unequal power relations. Thus, this rigid cultural dichotomy is depicted as “fixed, objective, homogeneous, ahistorical, and apolitical” (p. 17).

However, Kubota contends, these “fixed dichotomous categories,” such as collectivism versus individualism, rote memorization versus critical/analytical thinking, conserving knowledge versus extending knowledge, are problematic because there are “contradicting multiple discourses” (p. 18). For example, the notion of expanding knowledge is contradicted by “conservative arguments in

the U.S.” which advocate a Eurocentric canon, and exclude “diversified texts and voices that provide alternative views of the world” (p. 18). An another example of a “peculiar contradiction”: there is a shift from the “logical and objective thinking skills” that were promoted in the post-WWII Japanese school curriculum toward counter –logic and patriotic/nationalistic values, e.g., reverence for the emperor, in order to rescue and restore Japan's cultural identity in its struggle with the West during an era of globalization and internationalization. This shift infers that analytical, logical, and critical thinking “existed as an important component of the postwar Japanese school curriculum” (p. 18). And finally a revealing example of a contradiction in a U.S. educational context: Kubota cites Gimenez (1989:184), who complained about the silence in some undergraduate classrooms since the 1980s, where

... most students, seemingly unconcerned with content, laboriously, and uncritically write down whatever teachers say. They seldom challenge the teacher or their readings; controversy, and debate, when they arise, usually are about grading politics, and requirements.

Thus, self-expression and critical thinking, Kubota speculates, “may reflect not reality but rather what Americans *wish* to achieve” (p. 18; italics added). Thus, American college students display some of the classroom reticence and passivity Asian students have become widely criticized for.¹⁰ Finally, as Pennycook (1996) has noted, there is an obvious contradiction between an emphasis on self-expression and individual creativity and an emphasis on conformity to a fixed canon of knowledge, a canon written predominantly by white Anglo-Saxon male Protestants (WASPS).

10) Some scholars, for example Ngar-fun Liu and William Littlewood (1997:375-377), insist the East Asian students' alleged reticence and/or reluctance to participate in EFL/ESL classes is due not to any unique cultural determinants, but to the following three factors: first, a lack of experience in speaking English; second, a lack of confidence in spoken English; and third, anxiety from high performance expectations.

4. The Discourse Appropriated by the Other: The Uniqueness of Japanese Culture

Stereotypical and frequently demeaning images of the Other are not only constructed by the colonizing oppressors themselves; they are often appropriated by the Other itself, thus creating “self-Orientalism” (Iwabuchi 1994). And this self-Orientalization is, in fact, rampant among the Japanese. The question “What constitutes ‘Japaneseness?’” has intrigued researchers for decades. The labels found in discourses of Japanese uniqueness actually parallel those found in applied linguistics literature. However, since the 1980s, some critics argue that these labels are in fact “ideological constructs” designed merely to serve the vested interests of the Japanese government and Keiretsu by promoting harmony and homogeneity among the Japanese citizenry (both of which are ostensibly valuable in maintaining social and economic stability).

The topic of “Japaneseness,” of Japanese identity and national character, has been popular since the Meiji Period (1868-1912), when Japan experienced for the first time contact with Westerners. In the 1960s and 1970s, *nihonjinron*, “theories about the Japanese,” gained popularity in parallel with Japan’s stunning economic growth, which in turn was accompanied by rapid industrialization and Westernization/Americanization. Many researchers struggled to explain this unprecedented economic success, and many Western economists portrayed Japan as a model of economic development worthy of worldwide emulation. Was the source of this economic genius to be found in the Japanese people’s unique culture: the interpersonal relationships, group psychology, social behavior, lifestyles, language use (non-verbal and non-assertive), management practices, or perhaps neurological brain functions? All this discourse about Japanese culture emphasized Japan’s groupism or collectivism, and de-emphasized her diversity and heterogeneity.

However, since the 1980s, *nihonjinron* has come under severe censure by critics who view it as merely a form of cultural nationalism designed by political and business elites to rescue the Japanese from an identity crisis in the midst of relentless Westernization/Americanization. Undeniably there has been a steady erosion of traditional Japanese values and customs due to rapid post-WWII industrialization and Westernization. The concepts of harmony, groupism, and homogeneity tend to promote patriotism, and the concept of cultural uniqueness is a convenient excuse for Japanese businesses to resist free trade pressures by insisting, for example, that the Japanese have longer intestines than Westerners, hence their preference for home-grown vegetables as opposed to imported American beef!

Kubota argues that labels characterizing Japanese culture as group-oriented, harmonious, homogeneous, and the like, “need to be re-evaluated from a point of view of a discourse in which power relations construct and legitimate such particular beliefs” (pp. 21-22). The appropriation of *nihonjinron* by Japanese power-wielders “demonstrates their struggle to reclaim their identity and shift power relations” (p. 22). However, this does not represent the Japanese people’s authentic voice. Hence, ESL teachers must recognize that the cultural stereotypes characteristic of *nihonjinron* – e.g., the cultural dichotomy of collectivism versus individualism – are merely discourses constructed in order to preserve Japan’s threatened identity in the international community. These stereotypes are not expressions of true cultural essence but are “sites of struggle” where the students’ authentic voices compete to be heard.

5. Counter-knowledge from Recent Research on Japanese Education

In the sections above, Kubota examined the stereotypes of Japanese culture as “particular knowledge in discursive fields” (p. 22). However, power is not “unidirectional, nor is discourse monolithic.... In discursive fields, new truth emerges” (p. 22). These essentializations of Japanese culture are increasingly

being challenged by “new perspectives and empirical research” (p. 22). For example, in contrast to the grim picture of Japanese education portrayed frequently in applied linguistics literature – i.e., a realm of rote learning and suppression of creativity and self-expression – recent empirical studies have found that creativity, original thinking, and self-expression are being actively promoted in Japanese elementary education. Kubota then introduces other researchers (e.g., Tsuchida and Lewis 1996) who have found that the Japanese elementary school curriculum “promote[s] self-expression in various subject areas through music, body movement, language, senses, and so on” (p. 23). International research on teaching elementary school math has discovered that Japanese teachers used drills less often than their U.S. counterparts did (Stigler *et al.* 1996). Other studies have also re-conceptualized dichotomies such as collectivism versus individualism and rote memorization versus creativity/originality. Sato (1996) claims that both collective and individual dimensions are *complementary processes* in Japanese elementary schools. For example, group-building requires individual skills, which in turn can be used to help build or strengthen groups. Rote memorization provides a solid foundation for individuals to “create something new and original” (p. 24). And so on and so forth.¹¹⁾

Regarding secondary education, Kubota admits that the situation is somewhat more, so to speak, stereotypical: a greater emphasis is placed on rote memorization, due to pressures from, among other things, the Japanese college entrance examination (a classic “Washback Effect”). However, creativity,

11) One wonders how Kubota *et al.* would go about deconstructing the “orientalized” remarks made by the powerful Japanese politician Ichiro Ozawa, who, in his book, *Toward a Bolder Japan* (1994:19), observed the following about Japanese high school students: “They are not encouraged to talk or to write. They are not trained to think or to debate. They do not even learn that there is more than one way to interpret a single issue. Memorization takes priority over analysis... From elementary school to high school, children busily cram themselves with the correct answers. They go all the way to college without developing the habit of thinking for themselves. This cannot possibly produce autonomous citizens.”

original thinking, and self-expression are “fostered through *nonacademic* activities” (p. 23; italics added; see Rohlen 1983). Some empirical evidence demonstrates that Japanese adolescents outperform students from other countries in analytic skills in mathematics, such as hypothesis formation (Walberg *et al.* 1986). And whether or not emphasis on memorization has a negative effect on creativity and self-expression is, Kubota notes, “still a contentious issue” (p. 25). To summarize: recent empirical evidence challenges the cultural representations typically associated with Japanese culture and found in current applied linguistics literature: viz., homogeneity, groupism, and a lack of creativity and critical thinking. Thus, Kubota concludes, cultural labels such as individualistic and collectivistic constitute “particular knowledge rather than objective truth” (p. 25).

6. Pedagogical Issues: Critical Approaches to Culture and Language

In this final section, Kubota discusses in detail several controversial and contentious pedagogical options raised by the issues dealt with above. Two pedagogical models are available to ESL teachers who instruct culturally diverse students: the *acculturation model*, where the students are acculturated into the dominant language and culture; and the *pluralist model*, where the students are encouraged to express and retain their authentic voices, thereby fostering throughout society a cultural pluralism. Regarding the first model, the students are explicitly taught to overcome or suppress their cultural differences, thereby silencing their authentic voices. Regarding the second model, the students' authentic voices are given a chance to be heard, but, according to Kubota, the model fails to “give ESL students access to discourses of power” (p. 26). There needs to be a “critical examination of how cultural labels that distinguish one culture from another are produced in discourses and relations of power” (p. 27). The result is pedagogical tension:

viz., the ESL students are taught the “conventions of the target discourse community,” while simultaneously the same students are encouraged to preserve and protect their cultural identities. A third model is therefore the most viable option: viz., *critical multiculturalism*, would which rectify the deficiencies of both the acculturation and pluralist models.

Critical multiculturalism demands that cultural diversity must not only be recognized and respected by all parties concerned, but also critical investigations into cultural heritages should be carried out in order to understand them as the “consequence of social struggles over meanings that manifest certain political and ideological values and metaphors attached to them” (p. 27). Kubota quotes McLaren (1995:42), who claims that such cultural representations “stress the central task of transforming the social, cultural, and institutional relations in which meanings are generated.” Cultural labels and metaphors such as collectivism and individualism are not neutral or apolitical, but are produced and reinforced by social forces based on unequal relations of power. Thus, critical multiculturalism rejects the affirmation of cultural differences as ends in themselves. ESL professionals must go beyond simply affirming, respecting, and romanticizing the cultures of the Other; they need to explore critically why cultural differences as a form of knowledge are produced and perpetuated in order to transform the status quo.¹²⁾

However, critical multiculturalism as a means of social transformation has to deal with the “contentious issue of whether or not the dominant language and codes should be taught to ESL students” (p. 28). The above-mentioned acculturation model stresses the explicit teaching of the dominant community’s

12) One wonders how far a feminist/postmodernist/critical multiculturalist, being devoted to cultural/ethical relativism, would be willing to tolerate some of the “non-Western” practices found in certain cultures, say the Islamo-fascist Taliban theocracy where women are routinely treated as chattel, dissenters are tortured to death, polygamy is widely practiced, shoplifters get their hands chopped off, young girls are coerced into getting clitorectomies, women “caught in adultery” are stoned to death, homosexuals are persecuted and/or executed, and, last but not least, the flying of kites is outlawed.

culture, thereby silencing the authentic voices of the ESL students. The pluralist model encourages ESL students to express their authentic voices, but the model does not neglect the explicit teaching of the dominant community's culture as well. Critical multiculturalism, on the other hand, both affirms and critically interrogates what is perceived as the authentic voices of ESL students, and at the same time does not neglect the teaching of the culture of the dominant group. Knowledge of this culture will assist the ESL students "in their struggle to change the material and historical conditions that have enslaved them" (Freire and Macedo 1987:128). The dominant culture is not taught merely through *banking pedagogy*, whereby certain information is passed down uncritically to legitimize the existing unequal relations of power. Instead, it is taught to give ESL students a voice so they can "fight for the transformation of an unjust and cruel society" (Freire 1993:135). Kubota cites Rodby (1992), who advocates both learning the dominant culture and resisting the power of native speakers by appropriating the language of authority. Kubota also cites Grant and Sachs (1995:100), citing Lament and Lareau (1988), who argue the ridiculously obvious point that ESL students who don't acquire the dominant culture may suffer the "exclusion or inclusion from certain jobs, resources and high status groups." At the same time ESL students must be taught to understand that no particular culture or language is superior to others, that learning the dominant culture does not mean sacrificing one's cultural heritage, and that the acquisition of the dominant culture can be exploited to promote cultural equality within the wider society. (In a footnote to this statement, Kubota warns her readers that learning the dominant culture does not guarantee access to power.) Kubota summarizes this last section of her article by noting that respecting and preserving cultural diversity is necessary to "create equality in society" (p. 29). However, "in the present age of conservatism that is spreading outside ESL classrooms" (p. 29), this lofty goal may "not be shared by some schoolteachers, administrators, college professors, workers,

business leaders, fellow students, and others” (p. 29). Kubota exhorts ESL teachers to ensure that their students “have opportunities to develop skills which will allow them to participate fully in a dominant society” (pp. 29-30). At the same time, however, ESL teachers and learners must develop a “critical awareness of the social-cultural consequences of using the dominant language and find ways to appropriate the dominant language to create different meanings” (p. 30). But this accommodation, Kubota notes, citing Nieto (1996), is a two-way process: schools, institutions, and the wider society must “allow and adopt a strategy of accommodation without assimilation” (p. 30).

7. Critiques of Kubota’s “Japanese Culture Constructed by Discourses: Implications for Applied Linguistics Research and ELT”

At the conclusion of her article, Kubota laments: “I find the issues discussed in this article *highly complex and difficult to articulate*” (p. 30; italics added). In the remainder of this paper I will attempt to focus on several of these “highly complex and difficult to articulate” issues that caught my attention while reading Kubota’s article: first, I would like to throw caution to the wind and inquiry into what her motives were for writing such a convoluted screed;¹³⁾ and second, I would like to comment on her advocacy of ESL teachers introducing critical pedagogy such as critical multiculturalism into their classrooms in order to promote equality and justice.

13) First, the historical issues discussed at some length in Critique 1 are admittedly tangential to applied linguistics research. Second, it is a notoriously very delicate matter to attempt to discuss an author’s motives, something postmodernists deny is possible or desirable to ascertain. What interests them most, they insist, are the ways readers react to texts? Well, in this reader’s case, this was the reaction to Kubota’s article: “This Japanese professor is obviously struggling very hard to maintain her cultural identity while working in an American university.”

Critique 1

Japanese culture is the "haji" or the shame culture. *Most Japanese have been afraid of being ashamed or embarrassed.* For Japanese, being ashamed comes from doing something different from others. Likewise, showing individuality or being independent may cause an embarrassment, so Japanese feel carefree following others in a group. Japanese culture also values a harmony in human relationships. In Japan, an individualist is considered a cold-hearted and selfish person. Japanese value avoiding conflicts and keeping good relationships with others. Japanese companies are good examples of the value of harmony. — Naoko Taguchi, "The Group-Oriented Japanese," *Kaleidoscope* (1990)¹⁴

Throughout her article Ryuko Kubota accuses some applied linguists, especially researchers working in the field of writing and contrastive rhetoric, of creating, perpetrating, and perpetuating a discourse that unfairly essentializes Japanese culture as lacking in creativity and originality, among other negative stereotypes. To quote a famous line from Shakespeare's *Hamlet*: "The lady doth protest too much, methinks" (III, ii, 239). Having one's culture accused of unoriginality is undoubtedly a deeply humiliating experience, perhaps more so to a Japanese person, considering the culture's alleged tendency to inculcate a strong sense of shame in its citizenry. Is such a statement as this merely another egregious example of a Westerner's biased attempt to stereotype an Oriental culture? After all, isn't shame found universally in all cultures, Occidental as well as Oriental (recall Hester's "badge of shame" in Nathaniel Hawthorne's *Scarlet Letter*). Wasn't the American cultural anthropologist Ruth Benedict (1887) guilty of blatantly Orientalizing Japanese culture when, in her classic *The Chrysanthemum and*

14) Italics added. The quotation was excerpted from
<http://leo.stcloudstate.edu/kaleidoscope/volume1/group.html>

the Sword: Patterns of Japanese Culture (1946), she labeled Japan a “shame culture” and the West a “guilt culture”? Perhaps a partial answer to these questions can be found in the recent “Japanese High School Textbook Controversy” and the fury it has provoked among Japan's neighbors, especially China and the two Koreas.

On April 3, 2001, the Japanese Ministry of Education announced that it had authorized the publication of eight junior high school history textbooks that, from Chinese and Korean perspectives, grievously distort history and whitewash Japan's wartime atrocities. Many Japanese historians and scholars, especially members of the so-called Textbook Reform Society, which was founded in January 1997 and claims to have 10,000 members, have complained that history textbooks published since WWII have been “masochistic” and “anti-Japanese.” The eight new history textbooks that the Japanese government has recently approved for publication foist on the public a revised and, in the opinion of critics, sanitized version of Japanese history, a travesty that has provoked outrage throughout Asia. The new textbooks,¹⁵⁾ critics complain, strongly suggest that Japan fought the “the Greater East Asian War” to liberate Asian countries from Western colonization and build a “Greater East Asia Co-Prosperty Sphere.” Japanese victories in this war fostered dreams of, and the courage to struggle for, independence among the colonized peoples of Southeast Asian and India. The new textbooks gloss over Japan's well-documented war atrocities, which warrant only one sentence: “The Japanese military also committed unjust killings of, and ill-treatment of, captured soldiers and civilians of enemy nations in the regions which it advanced into and attacked during the war.” In addition, the textbooks in the most subtle way deny the horrendous immensity of the Nanjing Massacre.¹⁶⁾ Referring to “the Nanjing Incident”

15) For a summary of the history of the Japanese history textbook controversy, see <http://www.japanecho.co.jp/docs/html/240313.html>.

of 1937, they state that when the Japanese forces occupied Nanjing “there were many casualties among the civilians [inflicted] by the Japanese forces.” By contrast, the new textbooks go into elaborate detail about the war atrocities committed by the Allied Powers, in particular the U.S. nuclear attacks on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The same section describes in detail the Nazi Holocaust, which is followed by a paragraph extolling the deeds of two Japanese heroes, Kiichiro Higuchi and Chiune Sugihara, who helped Jews flee during the war.¹⁷⁾ The Japanese textbooks also completely ignore one of history’s most notorious war crimes, the enslavement of tens of thousands of “comfort women” as the sex slaves of the Japanese military.

Interestingly, Kubota, in her *TESOL Quarterly* article, referred to three of the above-mentioned “historically controversial events”: the Nazi Holocaust, the Nanjing Massacre, and the enslavement of thousands of “comfort women.” As is well known, postmodernists, being devout believers in ethical and cultural relativism, deny the possibility of humans ever being able to ascertain objective historical truth. Kubota gives Foucault “pride of place” in her article when on the second page she quotes him as saying :

-
- 16) That is, history's “Other Holocaust,” where Japanese soldiers mercilessly raped and slaughtered an estimated 300,000 people, mostly civilians and POWs, a crime for which Japan has never apologized, in contrast to Germany, which decades ago forthrightly took full responsibility for the Holocaust and compensated Israel for the Nazi crimes committed against the Jews.
 - 17) Which is somewhat ironic, considering the rabid anti-Semitism and stereotyping of Jews that is rampant among the Japanese people, especially at a time when the Japanese economy is the doldrums and “World Jewry” is once again a convenient target to blame. Though the Japanese as a whole appear to be in awe of Jewish financial and academic prowess (witnessed by the disproportionate number of Jews who have been recipients of Nobel Prizes in Economics), a surprising number of Japanese, and East Asians for that matter, believe the world's economy is under the complete control of American Jews, a viewpoint that mirrors the conspiracy portrayed in Hitler's favorite book, the “Protocols of the Elders of Zion.” For a detailed picture of anti-Semitism in Japan, see Jacob Kovalio, “A Glimpse at Anti-Semitism in Japan and Asia Pacific,” in R. Stauber, D. Porat (eds.), *Antisemitism Worldwide*. Tel Aviv University Press, 1998, pp. 281-290.

Now I believe the problem does not consist in drawing the line between that in a discourse which falls under the category of scientificity or truth, and that which comes under some other category, but in seeing historically how effects of truth are produced within discourses which in themselves are *neither true nor false* (Foucault 1980:118; italics added).

Sower (1999:737;italics added), in his response to Kubota's article, asks:

What does this mean? If we are freed from the requirements of scientific observation and truth, then we are left with only stories. How are we to choose among competing or incompatible tales? To avoid privileging one narrative over another, all must be equally “neither true nor false.” Did millions of Native Americans die after the arrival of Europeans in the New World, or is that just part of a discourse? Did millions of Chinese starve in the forced collectivization of agriculture during the Great Leap Forward, or does that come under some other category? Who will decide these things *if we abandon reason*, and on what basis?

Kubota, in her response to Sower's critique, writes (1999 : 751) :

Contrary to Sower's interpretation, what I am interested in is the discursive nature of historical knowledge, *not whether certain historical incidents occurred*. Historical knowledge as a discursive construct is clearly manifested in controversies, such as whether the Holocaust by the Nazis or the Nanjing Massacre by Imperial Japan actually took place and whether Comfort Women who served Japanese soldiers during the Pacific War were sexual slaves or prostitutes. Although the question, “Is a particular view on each of these incidents true or false?” is a legitimate one to explore, *what I want to focus on, instead, is how a certain new of history is connected to politics and ideology* (italics added).

While Kubota and apparently scores of her Japanese compatriots are apparently not particularly interested in whether or not “certain historical incidents occurred,” objective historical truth was clearly the goal sought by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) in South Africa, which

uncovered the truth of scores of human rights abuses that occurred to blacks during apartheid. The Commission was set up, in the words of Dullah Omar, former Minister of Justice,¹⁸⁾ as a “necessary exercise to enable South Africans to come to terms with their past on a morally accepted basis and to advance the cause of reconciliation.” Why then are the Japanese, in stark contrast to the Germans and even the South Africans, so reluctant to “come to terms with their past,” so reluctant to apologize for past misdeeds? Does this reluctance have something to do with Japan's culture, in particular its alleged “culture of shame?” Japan's historical amnesia is not total, however, because the country never fails on August 6 to conduct nationwide large-scale memorial services for the victims of the U.S. nuclear attacks on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Some scholars have referred this state-sponsored zeal every August as the “Hiroshima Cult,” whereby somber monuments and memorials dedicated to the victims of the atomic attacks have in effect converted Hiroshima's “Peace Park” into a “Mecca of World Peace.” Visitors to the park come away with the impression that the Japanese were the innocent victims not brutal victimizers or colonizers during WWII.¹⁹⁾ The atomic bombings in 1945 were particularly inhumane acts of war, and a persuasive argument could be made that the U.S. leaders who ordered the attacks should have been tried and punished as war criminals for violation of the Hague and Geneva Conventions (1907, 1949), which expressly forbid the intentional killing of noncombatants, especially innocent women and children, even to shorten a war, the argument advanced by some to justify the use of such weapons during WWII.

As was mentioned above, Kubota insists she is not particularly interested

18) Juxtapose this quote with one by the Japanese Justice, Minister Shigeto Nagano, who in May 1994 was dismissed from his post after saying that the 1937 “Rape of Nanjing,” where the death toll of civilians killed by Japanese troops exceeded the combined total from Hiroshima and Nagasaki, was “a hoax.”

19) Many ask why such horrible weapons weren't dropped also on the Germans, a “white race.”

in issues such as whether or not the Japanese military actually coerced thousands of women into becoming sex slaves for Japanese Imperial troops. What she does express interest in are the efforts the Japanese, the colonized, have been expending to self-Orientalize themselves in order to rescue their national identity in the face of a cultural onslaught from Westerners, the colonizers. In effect she is putting the blame for Japanese nationalism and ethnocentrism on the colonizers themselves. Many Japanese historians repeat with approval Noam Chomsky's argument (1969:191-192) that Japan was, in fact, not really to blame for its barbaric behavior in China during the 1930s, nor for its decision to attack Pearl Harbor. Japan itself was already a victim of European and American imperialism, and the country was merely trying to defend itself from imperialist aggressors. It was instead the United States and not Japan that was the true aggressor during WWII:

[Japan] was in no position to tolerate a situation in which India, Malaya, Indo-china, and the Philippines erected tariff barriers favoring the mother country, and could not survive the deterioration in its very substantial trade with the United States and the sharp decline in China trade. It was, in fact, being suffocated by the American and British and other Western imperial systems, which quickly abandoned their lofty liberal rhetoric as soon as the shoe began to pinch.

Be that as it may (and the same argument could easily be made to justify Hitler's aggression in Europe), it is likely that there is some trait in Japanese culture which can partially explain Japan's consistent reluctance to, among other things, "come to terms with its past." Several years ago, two American psychologists, albeit both Westerners,²⁰⁾ conducted a cross-cultural investigation of embarrassment.²¹⁾ Singelis and Sharkey (1995) found that

20) There is an apparent "Catch-22" at work here: viz., if the researchers are Western, their research results are, ipso facto, biased toward "Western values."

21) Defined as a "short lived emotional/psychological response of social chagrin (i.e., anxiety or fear that is due to negative sanctioning or lower evaluations from others)

embarrassment was more pronounced in Asians cultures than in Western cultures, in collectivist cultures than in individualist cultures. Nothing surprising here. In the former cultures, especially those under the influence of Confucianism, there is an emphasis on relationships, face-saving, a harmony of interactions, and the importance of conformity, the very terms Kubota condemns as unfair but typical stereotypes on non-Western societies. Singelis and Sharkey examined 690 undergraduates at the University of Hawaii, divided almost equally by gender. The ethnocultural background of the participants, who were administered Modigliani's Embarrassability Scale (ES), was 42.3% Japanese-Americans, 22.5% Chinese-Americans, 17.1% Euro-Americans, 13.7% Filipino-Americans, and 4.4% Korean-Americans. Their study found that both culture and self-image "are strongly associated with embarrassability" (p. 634). Specifically, Asian-Americans were less independent, more interdependent, and more embarrassable than were Euro-Americans" (p. 634). The authors then go out of the way to insist that these research results must not be taken to mean the embarrassability of the Asian-Americans constitutes a deficiency, a personality defect.²²⁾ Also, individual differences exist *within* ethnocultural groups. The authors then recommend that the concept of face and face-saving warrants "detailed analysis in future studies of culture and embarrassment" (pp. 636-637). There should be little doubt then that Japan's frustrating propensity to hide from its sinister past is attributable to cultural differences vis-à-vis Germany, ironically a fellow Axis member during WWII. As is the case with Kubota, who I believe, to go out on a limb somewhat, wrote her *TESOL Quarterly* article

that occurs as a result of a discrepancy between one's idealized role-identity and one's presented role-identity and the uncertainty that follows an incident" (p. 623). Shame and embarrassment are synonyms, the former defined in the *American Heritage Dictionary* as a "painful emotion caused by a strong sense of guilt, embarrassment, unworthiness, or disgrace."

- 22) The authors write that "generalizability of the results reported here should be approached with caution when referring to national groups" (p. 638).

primarily out of simple embarrassment over having to hear and read applied linguists repeat over and over that the Japanese are only good at imitating the West, that the Japanese are incapable of apologizing or talking about their weaknesses out of strong feelings of shame. One could argue, of course, that this cultural trait, which is found in varying degrees within and without all cultures, but apparently more so in Asian countries, particularly Japan, has been implanted, constructed, or invented by Western colonialists and imperialists. But surely there should come a time when a country must begin to assume at least some responsibility for its historical misdeeds. Perhaps Japan could learn a few pointers from one of its closest neighbors, a nation it had brutally colonized from 1910-1945. The Republic of Korea has made enormous strides in coming to terms with its less than democratic past, and this is reflected in South Korea's increasingly objective high school history textbooks. Unfortunately, this is not the case with North Korea, whose high school textbooks continue to deify the Kim Il-song/Kim Jong-il dynasty, history's most preposterous personality cult, in the most glowing terms. Both North and South Korea possess basically the same language and culture, so how does one account for such diverse behavior? In the North there festers one of history's most ghastly dictatorships, a broken-down, pseudo-socialist state now virtually entirely dependent on international food handouts to keep its populace from starvation; in the South there thrives a vibrant democracy lead by a Nobel Peace Prize winner. Could there be a more dramatic dichotomy than this?

Critique 2

To English professors, at least, postmodernist criticism is very real and a danger to their "authority in the classroom" – Robert C. Solomon (1990:283).

In the last section of Kubota's article she proposes that the only viable

solution to the grievous problem she has investigated, viz., the unfair stereotyping of ESL students from non-Western cultures, is for ESL teachers to introduce into their classrooms *critical pedagogy* (CP, of which critical multiculturalism is apparently a variant). CP attempts to, in the words of Henry Giroux:²³) 1) “create new forms of knowledge through its emphasis on breaking down disciplines and creating interdisciplinary knowledge; 2) *raise questions about the relationships between the margins and centers of power in schools* and is concerned about how to provide a way of reading history as part of a larger project of *reclaiming power and identity, particularly as these are shaped around the categories of race, gender, class, and ethnicity*; 3) reject the distinction between high and popular culture so as to make curriculum knowledge responsive to the everyday knowledge that constitutes peoples' lived histories differently; [and] 4) illuminate the primacy of the ethical in defining the language that teachers and others use to produce particular cultural practices.” Pennycook (1990) offers this more succinct definition: CP “seeks to understand and critique the historical and sociopolitical context of schooling and to develop pedagogical practices that aim not only to *change the nature of schooling*, but also the wider society” (italics added).

A key distinction should be made between two types of schooling: *banking education*, whereby teachers attempts to pour their knowledge into their students' minds; and *transformative education*, i.e., true critical pedagogy, whereby dialogues are undertaken between teachers and students about real-world issues that are meaningful to their students in order to encourage and support the students' political and personal development. Can such ambitious and pretentious student-centered goals be implemented in humble ESL classrooms? “In general,” Crookes and Lehner write (1998), “ES/FL teachers have not been encouraged to address sociopolitical issues

23) Italics added. The quote is taken from <http://www.perfectfit.org/CT/giroux2.html>.

that educators like Freire (1970) have placed within the very heart of educational purposes.” Thus, the vast majority of ESL teachers have in effect been duteous practitioners of banking education in their teacher-centered classrooms, with very little concern or encouragement expressed for their students’ “political and personal development.”

During the spring semester of 1995, Crookes and Lehner conducted a graduate course on Critical Pedagogy in the ESL Department at the University of Hawaii. Presented below are lengthy excerpts from an online article they wrote about this experience, excerpts which provide a valuable insight into potential problems that might be incurred in Asian contexts if attempts were ever made to implement CP there:²⁴⁾

In initial planning, we were very concerned that patterns of domination or oppression should not be reestablished at the interpersonal level in a class that was supposed to be working to overcome them at a societal level. Relatedly, we also were deliberate that the matter of grading and what, if anything, was to come out of the class by way of “product” had to be determined by the class as a whole, subject to administrative constraints....

Recognizing that there can be no one critical pedagogy, we felt that the class would represent this specific group’s understanding of critical pedagogy as applied to their own education. That is to say, we did not have the responsibility of trying to make the class take the form of our critical pedagogy. Such an approach would have been antithetical to the general understanding behind the class. Since the students were not particularly familiar with critical pedagogy, and since neither one of us had taught a graduate class on this topic, we were prepared for the possibility that certain aspects of the class, or certain sessions, would not “work.” But in addition, we were convinced that it was in the nature of the philosophy of critical pedagogy that such a possibility would have to be accepted in a course using a double-loop technique. After all, since *critical pedagogy implies a relationship of community*

24) Italics added. Excerpts are from http://www.hawaii.edu/sls/crookes/crit_ped.html.

between students and teacher, such that they learn together and make decisions together, we could not continually steer the class from positions of authority....

Following the initial phases of negotiation of format and content, and work on the initial definitional understanding of critical pedagogy, the major part of the course was taken up with students leading discussion on topics, usually based upon readings that they had come up with themselves, and occasionally using material sought from Graham or Al. Workshop style exercises were created and run by the students drawing on such topics as feminism, Foucault, and a critique of critical pedagogy.... They related to concerns or problems that students would face in implementing critical pedagogy or to issues that had come up in previous discussions and were usually related to a final paper which students had decided to write. Overall, this was seen positively: a representative student evaluation comment was, "The instructor gave us to freedom to decide what we want to do to fulfill the course requirement. All [this is] new to me. Most important of all, I felt like doing all I could to learn what I like to learn."...

... Sanders (1968) remarks, "Freire favors the frankness to *eliminate from a training program for problem-posing teachers those prospective teachers who are not committed to the basic philosophy....*" We did not encounter quite this situation, but *there were very considerable differences concerning the extent to which participants agreed with, or even understood, the underlying critique of society that is implicit in critical pedagogy. In evaluation comments, one student wrote, "I think the problem with the composition of this class is that quite a few students weren't quite convinced that traditional education is biased, discriminatory and perpetuates the status quo."* Some students took the position, initially, that they would be unable to engage in any kind of classroom practice in their future employment even approximating critical pedagogy, and so they would prefer to be trying simply to develop critical thinking among their students. As instructors, we were more interested in seeking to have the whole group of students work out their own responses to these positions, rather than advocating our own views as strongly as we could have.... Views in this area did shift, in any case: one final comment from a student was "I feel everyone in the class has evolved through the semester to less conservative positions

about teaching and education....”

However, in our class, about half the members were from countries in East Asia, and a common, persistent refrain was one of pessimism concerning their freedom of action as teachers when they returned to their home countries. Graham found this a bit disheartening....

There were many silences longer than are common in university classrooms, which was more a source of tension for Graham than AI. It was a source of tension because it often arose when students were expecting the instructors to provide an opinion or evaluation on an issue, whereas we were resisting being pushed back into banking education and away from the community of learners model.

It is interesting to read that students “from countries in East Asia” (about half of the class) were especially pessimistic concerning “their freedom of action as teachers when they returned to their home countries. Graham found this a bit disheartening....” One does not have to be an expert in cross-cultural educational psychology to be able to predict that CP will be very difficult to implement in Asian educational milieus.

Few ESL teachers would question the desirability or doubt the feasibility of fostering in their classrooms an awareness of and tolerance for the diverse cultures of their students. However, such an effort at pluralistic multiculturalism would not be good enough for Kubota, who, borrowing heavily from Giroux (1995) and McLaren (1995), opts instead for critical multiculturalism, the express purpose of which is to transform society by eliminating inequalities of power, especially those imposed by “a privileged elite of white Euro-Americans” who “control the information banks and terrorize the majority of the population into a state of intellectual and material impoverishment” (McLaren 1995:45). Thus, in order resist and overthrow this oppression, groups will have to be classified according to race, gender, class, sexual orientation, and so on, in order to rid the world of prejudice based on race, gender, class, sexual orientation, and so on.

"How this will work is left a little hazy," Sower comments sarcastically (1999:742). "Perhaps it will wither away like the state under Communism."

Kubota argues that the notion of voice will become "understood not as an expression of true cultural essence" (p. 22), but, quoting Pennycook, as a "site of struggle where the subjectivity of the language-user confronts the conditions of possibility formulated between language and discourse" (Pennycook, 1994:296). This abstruse observation, typical of much of postmodernist discourse, frankly resembles something spewed out by the irrepressible "Postmodernism Generator."²⁵⁾

Be that as it may, and ignoring for the moment Pennycook's assertion that the English language itself is intrinsically imperialistic,²⁶⁾ why should ESL teachers be obliged to transform their classrooms into "sites of struggle" for radical egalitarianism, when there is, postmodernists tell us, no objective truth to begin with, only individual "knowledges" [sic]? Why should radical egalitarianism take preference over other "isms" advocated or created by,

25) The Postmodernism Generator can be accessed at <http://www.elsewhere.org/cgi-bin/postmodern/>. For an incisive yet entertaining expose of the contemporary academic farce known as postmodernism, visit <http://www.physics.nyu.edu/faculty/sokal/>, where there is a wealth of material about the clever hoax the American physicist Alan Sokal perpetrated in 1996 in *Social Text*, a leading journal of cultural studies, in an essay suggesting a link between quantum mechanics and post-modernism (*Transgressing the Boundaries: Towards a Transformative Hermeneutics of Quantum Gravity*). Sokal perpetrated the elaborate hoax to see if the journal would publish an article literally buried under a mountain of nonsensical postmodernist blather provided 1) it sounded plausible, and 2) the article went out of its way to flatter the editors' "ideological preconceptions." Sokal's efforts were rewarded because none of the editors realized they were had until Sokal himself exposed the hoax in *Lingua Franca*. "But why did I do it? I confess that I'm an unabashed Old Leftist who never quite understood how deconstruction was supposed to help the working class. And I'm a stodgy old scientist who believes, naively, that there exists an external world, that there exist objective truths about that world, and that my job is to discover some of them."

26) Taking Robert Phillipson's "linguistic imperialism" thesis one step further, Pennycook argues in *English and the Discourses of Imperialism* that the English language itself is intrinsically imperialistic. Pennycook isn't arguing, is he, that those who speak English as a mother tongue will have to, so to speak, stifle the incessant urge to go out and colonize, say, South Pacific islands? And doesn't Pennycook's linguistic determinist assertion breathe new life into the Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis?

say, white, male, Western elites? And is it wise to introduce into ESL classrooms pedagogies laden with ideological and political overtones, albeit couched in terms that suggest tolerance, inclusiveness, and pluralism? Recall Crookes and Lehner's citing (p. 324) of Sander's remarks about Freire:

Freire favors the frankness to eliminate from a training program for problem-posing teachers those prospective teacher who are not committed to the basic philosophy.

Here we learn that Freire, the founding father of CP, was himself exclusionist and intolerant. Gupta, a critical anthropologist, once remarked (1996:194) that any "emancipatory movement that tries to fashion a new, coherent identity carries with it its own repressive agenda." Thus, Atkinson remarks (1999:747), "we should be very careful and thoughtful before jumping onto any bandwagon that professes to save the world."

Finally, it might be interesting to inquire if Kubota in her university classrooms indeed practices what she preaches. A cursory glance at excerpts of the syllabi available online at her University of North Carolina web site²⁷⁾ does not shown any hint of a concerted effort to implement critical multiculturalism into her classrooms. For example, in her Advanced Japanese course (Fall Semester, 2001) under "course objectives," she writes:

COMMUNICATION

1. To describe, narrate, explain, and express opinions on familiar topics in everyday situations and some current topics orally and in writing using some abstract vocabulary and sentence connectors.
2. To be able to handle successfully basic tasks in social situations orally and in writing in a *culturally appropriate manner*.
3. To understand the main ideas and most details of live messages such as lectures and presentations on current or past issues of Japanese

27) At <http://www.unc.edu/~rkubota/englishpage.html>.

culture and society.

4. To understand details of the passages in the textbook.
5. To understand the main ideas and some details of printed materials from Japanese newspapers, magazines, e-mail, etc.
6. To become aware of different styles in writing (i.e., *keitai*, *jotai*, *dearu-tai*) used for different purposes and functions (e.g., letters, notes, diaries, essays, etc.).
7. To hand write notes and postcards using appropriate kanji and kana.
8. To write formal essays on Japanese culture and society or other topics of interest using word processing software.
9. To make oral presentations on Japanese culture and society or other topics of interest.

CULTURE

1. To use appropriate verbal and nonverbal cues (body language, language register, etc.) in some social and cultural contexts.
2. *To identify various patterns of behavior or interaction that commonly occur in Japanese culture and discuss how they are related to people's perspectives.*
3. To identify various tangible and intangible products in Japanese culture and discuss how they are related to people's perspectives.
4. To understand, appreciate, and critically assess ways of life in Japanese culture presented in audiovisual and print materials and perspectives behind them.

COMPARISONS

1. To demonstrate awareness of linguistic variations according to gender, age, social status, and regional differences and how they compare with other languages.
2. *To develop critical insight into cultural differences often created through cultural comparisons.*

Nothing particularly egalitarian or culturally pluralistic can be discerned here: Kubota's language class appears to be a typically teacher-centered one where the implementation of controversial pedagogies such as critical

multiculturalism, which has been designed to transform classrooms into “sites of struggle” for social justice and equality, is grossly inappropriate.

8. Conclusion

[The first stage of ethnocentrism] is the inability to see things as different. -- Milton Bennett(1996:15).

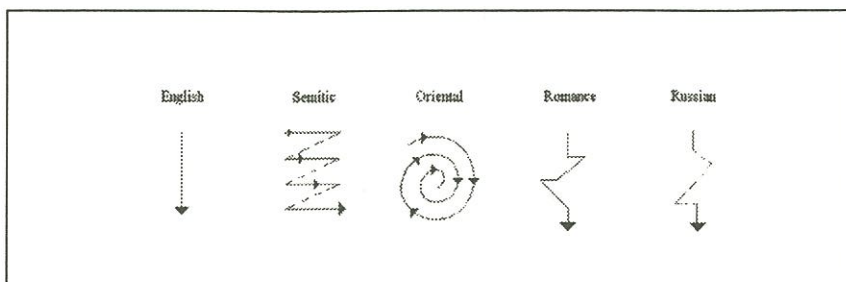


Figure 1: Kaplan's "Cultural Thought Patterns" (1966).

According to Kaplan's (1966) famous and now highly controversial "squiggly" models of cross-cultural contrastive rhetoric (CR), writers who employ the English language as their mother tongue tend to write sentences that are linear and clear, while writers who employ the Chinese language as their mother tongue tend to write sentences that, well, spin inwardly! Pennycook (1998) scoffs at such blatant Orientalizing, labeling Kaplan's "scholarship" as little more than ethnocentric poppycock: i.e., Westerns are stereotyped as direct and to the point, Easterners as indirect and illogical. Pennycook notes that Kaplan even has a precursor, Bateson Wright,²⁸⁾ a

28) Apparently no hard feelings linger in the hearts of the colonized concerning the ethnocentric Wright, for on the school's web site is the following: "The bust of ex-principal Bateson Wright, now standing proudly in the foyer of our Alma Mater, is the only surviving artifact from the Hollywood Road campus after WWII. The apparent flaw on Wright's forehead was in fact damage caused by Japanese shrapnel

former headmaster of the Central School in Hong Kong, who wrote that the average Chinese student was “incapable of sustaining an argument, starting with false premisses [sic] and cheerfully pursuing a circuitous course to the point from which he started.” Wright prescribed a “rigid course of geometrical study” to cure the Chinese student's rhetorical incapacities. Such images of the “illogical Other” were contradicted by what Pennycook witnessed when he taught English to Chinese students in China:

A number of years ago, when I was teaching in China, I was intrigued to see that one of the textbooks used for teaching writing at the senior levels of the undergraduate programme... discussed in its introduction Kaplan's (1966) models of contrastive rhetoric. Shortly afterwards, I was listening to a student discussing some of her frustrations at trying to learn to write in English: why is it, she wanted to know, that *English writing always went round and round and round*, with its introductions, conclusions, topic sentences and the like, while Chinese was written in a straight, clear line? As she drew the patterns of text in the air, I saw Kaplan's diagrams being formed almost perfectly in reverse (p. 161; italics added).

Which description, then, is empirically verifiable, the one by Kaplan (1966) or the one by Pennycook's Chinese student? Are Western writers or Eastern writers the ones guilty of writing sentences that *always go round and round and round*? From a postmodernist perspective, a convincing answer to such a question will probably not be forthcoming because heretofore many practitioners of CR have misused, perhaps inadvertently, the device to construct and perpetuate negative cultural stereotypes.²⁹⁾ The three

when Hong Kong was besieged.” See <http://www.csc.uvic.ca/~schan1/qcintro.html>.

29) CR is also open to criticisms from a methodological standpoint. Grabe and Kaplan (of all people) note CR theory itself has serious design flaws (1996:198). “But the most serious problem lies in the fact that there is no universal theoretical model for contrast; it is regrettably the case that the findings of various scholars cannot easily be compared because results were often derived from different research paradigms and from different empirical bases.... These problems constrained the usefulness of

applied linguists mentioned by Atkinson in his recent article about culture in *TESOL Quarterly*, namely, Zamel (1997), Spack (1997), and Kubota (1999), have warned that CR is a “potentially hazardous enterprise” (Spack 1997:765). Cross-culturally writing styles do indeed differ, but CR analysis always runs the danger of producing or perpetuating negative cultural stereotypes: e.g., Westerners are logical, Easterners are illogical. Thus, there seems to be an extraordinary reluctance on the part of Western postmodernists, and Eastern postmodernists with various political agendas or personal axes to grind, to engage in cross-cultural labeling because such enterprises invariably lead to ethnocentrism, racism, sexism, ageism, and specism, ad infinitum, ad nauseam. This ultra-sensitivity regarding cultural stereotyping can be illustrated by several somewhat scatterbrained comments made by Spack (1997:766), who served as sort of a mentor to Kubota when she wrote her *TESOL Quarterly* (1999) article:

The first time I became aware of the problem of labeling was when I took my present job 17 years ago, at which time the program was described as *English for foreign students*, a label I was uncomfortable with. When we call students *foreign*, what identity are we constructing? Any dictionary will tell us that *foreign* means “alien,” “strange,” “not natural.” Its other meanings are no less satisfactory. They include “inappropriate,” “nonessential,” and “irrelevant.” Furthermore, the label foreign is intimately connected with U.S. ethnocentrism, which is reflected in the canonical literature. In Henry James's *Daisy Miller*, for example, an American character refers to an Italian man he meets as a foreigner, even though both men are in Italy at the time!³⁰

...

Although the L2 field is presumed to be inclusive and accepting of

contrastive rhetoric both as a research base and as a base from which to make pedagogical decisions.”

30) This brings to mind an experience I had several years ago in a Korean restaurant in Koreatown, Los Angeles. The Korean waitress at our table said in Korean to the members of the family that had invited me out to eat that evening: “And what would this foreigner like to eat?”

diversity, teachers and researchers have a tendency to use labels that, wittingly or unwittingly, preserve a system that situation people in dominant and subordinate positions. The major organization that unites teachers in this field, TESOL, calls students *speakers of other languages*. *Other* than what? Other than English, of course. By implication, English is the norm against which the other, the different, is measured. Why is English not the other language? Could not students be learning English as an/other language? But more to the point, instead of using language that sets us apart from one another, we should be in the business of using language that brings us together.

This is all well and good, except that in most countries of the world the promotion of cultural pluralism is hardly at the top of the list of national priorities. Japan is a textbook case of a xenophobic country, although apologists such as Kubota attempt to justify this xenophobia as an inevitable reaction to a loss of cultural identity due to Westernization / Americanization. Egregious examples of this xenophobia abound, but suffice it to recall former Japanese Prime Minister Yasuhiro Nakasone's politically-incorrect comments made during a speech to his Liberal Democratic Party comrades (September 22, 1986): "America's intellectual level is lower than Japan's because American society has too many blacks, Mexicans and Puerto Ricans."

However, such unwillingness on the part of some applied linguists such as Zamel (1997), Spack (1997), and Kubota (1999) to dichotomize cultures, particularly East versus West cultures, flies in the face of recent empirical evidence that there is indeed an East-West cultural dichotomy, and one that may have implications for applied linguistics research.

In a recent and important study by Nisbett, *et al.* (2001), in an article entitled, "Culture and Systems of Thought: Holistic Versus Analytic Cognition," the authors found that based on performances using the Rod-and-Frame Test (RFT),³¹⁾ East Asian (i.e., Chinese, Korean, and Japanese) students made

more “errors” than Westerners,³²⁾ and are thus more *Field-Dependent*. Whereas East Asians tend to be holistic (or global, i.e., *Field-Dependent*), Westerners tend to be more analytic (i.e., *Field-Independent*). East Asians tend to see the whole where Westerners see the parts; East Asians tend to more easily see relationships among elements in a field, but simultaneously find it more taxing to differentiate an object when it is embedded in the field. Westerners, on the other hand, find it easier to separate an object from the field in which it is embedded. These two distinctly different cognitive processes are, Nisbett *et al.* note, “embedded in different naive metaphysical systems and tacit epistemologies.” The authors speculate that the origin of these cross-cultural differences is “traceable to markedly different social systems” (2001:291), the former exhibiting tendencies that are collectivistic, and the later individualistic.³³⁾

Does the East-West dichotomy revealed by this empirical research have

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- 31) The Rod-and-Frame Test (RFT): the pilot trainee was seated in a chair (which would be tilted clockwise or counterclockwise) in a completely darkened room. All the trainee could see were two objects: a) a luminous square frame (also tiltable clockwise or counterclockwise), and b) a luminous rod located at the center of this square frame (also tiltable clockwise or counterclockwise, independently of the frame). The trainee’s task was to align the luminous rod to a position where he or she thought it was vertical (while the square frame and the chair remained tilted). Trainees who consistently “succeeded” on this task were labeled *Field-Independent* (FI); those who “failed” the task were said to be *Field-Dependent* (FD). The former used “internal (body) clues” to solve the problem (i.e., to determine verticality), the latter used “external clues.” Astonishingly, some FDs aligned the rod with a square frame (the visual field) that was tilted 30 degrees to the left!
- 32) The participants in this experiment were 56 European American (27 men and 29 women) and 42 East Asian (19 men and 23 women) undergraduate students at the University of Michigan. The East Asian participants were mainly from China, Korea, and Japan. The East Asian participants had stayed in the U.S. on the average of less than 2½ years. The participants from the two cultures were matched based on SAT math scores.
- 33) In a fascinating experiment that helps somewhat to illustrate this collectivist-individual cross-cultural dichotomy, Han, Liechman, and Wang (1998) studied the daily events of Chinese, Korean, and American children, ages 4-6 years (e.g., things that they did before bedtime or how they spent their last birthday). American children made three times more self-references to the self than either the Chinese or Korean children.

any implication for applied linguistics and second language acquisition? Space limitations prevent introducing only the following example: in the early 1970s, some applied linguists touted cloze tests as valid and reliable measures of global language proficiency.³⁴⁾ However, in 1983, Stansfield and Hansen claimed that cloze tests were biased against Field-Dependents. Kang, a Korean educator at Pusan University, Korea, found (1985) no empirical evidence to substantiate this alleged cloze test bias. However, she based her research not on the Rod-and-Frame test but on the Group Embedded Figures Test (GEFT). Thus, this issue in applied linguistics is still unresolved, and it is an issue of some importance because many ESL teachers use cloze tests in their classrooms as learner-centered and learner-friendly measures of language proficiency.

It goes without saying that ESL teachers must be tolerant and understanding of their students' cultures, and must be careful not to stereotype their students based on what they understand about these cultures. However, deeply embedded cross-cultural differences do exist, differences that are not necessarily the constructions of Western orientalizers, and these cultural differences often do indeed have important pedagogical implications for applied linguistics research and ELT.

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34) In the late 1970s, however, several language testing specialists began to question some of the claims made by cloze-testing advocates, arguing, for example, that different *texts* produced different *tests*.

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Abstract

Should ESL Teachers Transform Their Classrooms into 'Sites of Struggle' for Radical Egalitarianism?

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The purpose of this paper is to summarize, discuss, and critique some of the observations and interpretations made by Ryuko Kubota in her *TESOL Quarterly* (1999) article: "Japanese Culture Constructed by Discourses: Implications for Applied Linguistics Research and ELT." Kubota argues that recent applied linguistics literature tends to construct an artificial cultural dichotomy between the East (the Other, especially the Japanese) and the West (especially Euro-Americans), the former being characterized by collectivism (which is negative in connotation), the latter by individualism (which is positive in connotation). She criticizes these taken-for-granted cultural labels, and attempts to demonstrate that recent empirical research challenges the veracity of these unjust essentializations of the Other. She then offers another way to accommodate cultural differences by adopting a critical multiculturalist perspective, the goal of which is radical egalitarianism between individuals and cultures. After a lengthy review of Kubota's observations and interpretations, I critique several points she made in her article, in particular her admission of a lack of interest in the truth or falsehood of certain historical events, and her advocacy of ESL teachers transforming their classrooms into "sites of struggle" for the purpose of pursuing "equality, morality, and justice."